

Pakistan Affairs

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Q5 18th Amendment has essentially altered the nature of federation in Pakistan; where the strong center is facing challenges from autonomous provinces. This has become an enduring cause of political strain in Pakistan. Discuss.

1. Introduction

The 18th amendment, ~~was~~ enacted in 2018, stands as a landmark in Pakistan's constitutional history. This amendment made a radical shift from "strong center" model towards a ~~highly~~ highly decentralized federation by introducing several key features such as; delegation of power to provinces through which legislative and financial authority over key subjects like education, health, and natural resources was transferred to significantly to provincial ~~govt~~ governments. Secondly it abolished the concurrent list that allowed federal and provincial governments to legislate on certain subjects, ~~to~~ now granting exclusive legislative authority to provinces in designated areas. Furthermore, the President's power to dissolve Parliament was curtailed and provincial ~~power~~ control over finances and administrative functions was supported. This Amendment to the constitution granted unprecedented legislative and financial independence to provinces simultaneously weakening the center's ability to influence provincial affairs, thus the strong center

Started facing challenges from the autonomous provinces that has led to political strain in Pakistan.

2. Challenges Posed to Strong Center by the 18th Amendment

a. Transfer of financial and legislative authority leading to creating friction with federal government.

The 18th amendment has brought a radical shift in Pakistan's political landscape, marked by significant devolution of legislative and financial authority over key areas like education, health, and natural resources.

This transfer of power from federal to provincial government, has undoubtedly ~~create~~ empowered provinces but also has created a complex web of frictions with the federal center and also created interprovincial ~~friction~~ rivalries. As provinces can now tailor their own policy ~~over~~ ~~the~~ ^{over} natural resources has caused a dispute as the Indus water treaty dispute between Sindh and Punjab. Furthermore the educational reforms pushed by some provinces contradicts with federal initiatives. Besides this there also has been disagreements over provincial shares of finance as ~~was~~ revealed by a 2021 PIDE study that Sindh feels disadvantaged of its financial share.

b. Provincial autonomy has fueled rise of regional identities.

As the 18th amendment has empowered provinces over tailoring their province specific policies ~~into~~, this has led to the empowerment of provincial narratives. With greater control over cultural programs, language policies, and local development initiatives, provinces actively shape their own narratives. This strong regional identities may challenge the unifying narrative of a monolithic Pakistani identity, and divergent priorities and policies inconsistencies can create sense of disunity.

C. 18th amendment clipping the wings of federation

The 18th amendment has clipped the wings of federation through restricting its intervention in provincial matters. This has brought great tension and potential disputes for instance there is a coordination challenge.

As counter-terrorism efforts, require ~~strong~~ strong interprovincial cooperation. This can be hampered by divergent priorities and limited central authority ~~as the~~ as a result the provincial border security approaches may not align with national strategies.

3. Reasons of Political Strain due to 18th Amendment:

A. Interprovincial Conflicts casting shadow on national politics.

With empowerment of provinces comes in hand the ignition of interprovincial conflicts.

These conflicts often revolve around three key flashpoints - resource sharing, water rights and inter-provincial migration. In the resource

water rights domain
 Sharing domain comes in issues like Indus water treaty dispute between Punjab and Sindh. Then in resource sharing area the national finance Commission turns into a ~~played~~ battleground where provinces accuse each other for taking extra budget share. While the influx of Pakistan and Baloch migrants to Sindh has raised concerns about demographic changes and cultural shift. All these issues hinder national progress as legal disputes and policy clashes delay crucial infrastructure projects like dams and water resource management initiatives and also erode national cohesion as regional tensions and accusations of favoritism undermine the sense of unity and shared national identity.

- b. Divergent provincial policies and priorities clash with federal government's national agenda. The 18th amendment has opened a new battleground for centre-province discord. Divergent provincial policies and priorities clash with federal government's national agenda, leading to legislative gridlock, policy incoherence, and hindering effective governance and development. For instance a balancing environmental protection with economic development becomes a balancing act. Provincial policies promoting industrial growth might contradict with the center's environmental regulations, impacting national goals for sustainability and resource management.

Conclusion

The 18th Amendment has undoubtedly altered the power dynamics within Pakistan's Federation, granting provinces greater autonomy and raising complex challenges for the center. The resulting political strain highlights the need for a delicate balancing act. Embracing the benefits of a decentralized system, such as regional development and diverse narratives, must be coupled with the efforts to maintain national cohesion and effective governance. Robust interprovincial dialogue platforms, transparent resource allocation mechanisms, and collaborative federalism, where center and provinces work together towards shared national goals, are crucial steps in this direction. Only by reconciling the demands of autonomy and cohesion can Pakistan navigate the turbulent waters of its decentralized federation and build a stable, prosperous future for all its citizens.